

**June 3, 2011**

## **PROJECT UPDATE: Launching a Pilot of the Network for Innovation and Creativity**

### **Meeting with National Leadership Council on May 11th:**

At the request of the National Leadership Council (NLC), the national Network Project Team prepared a Concept Paper that examined how the NPS can more intentionally support innovation, share knowledge, and adapt at a pace required within rapidly changing organizational, technological and societal contexts. At their May meeting, Deputy Director Mickey Fearn, National Park System Advisory Board member Meg Wheatley, and several members of the Network Project Team engaged in a 3-hour discussion with the NLC. There was strong support from the NLC for the Network concept and they endorsed moving forward with the pilot as an experiment to intentionally learn and inform Network implementation.

### **Goal of the Network:** *"It's not about critical mass; it's about critical connections."* -- Meg Wheatley

The goal of the Network is to more rapidly share knowledge, new approaches, and insights from practical experience to solve mission-critical problems and advance organizational excellence. By supporting a higher level of peer-to-peer collaboration across the national park system, the Network will encourage and share innovation and improve performance. The Network will benefit NPS and partner practitioners in all disciplines, building an engaged 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce with the capacity and creativity to advance national priorities – relevancy, education, stewardship, and workforce – and accomplish the NPS mission. Ultimately, the Network is a tool to help the NPS remain relevant and more effectively serve the American public.

### **Key Components of the Network (see attached diagram):**

**Practitioners** are NPS staff and their partners who create, use and contribute to the Network. They will benefit from finding colleagues across the system and exchanging knowledge to improve their practice.

**Communication Tools** will support rapid and widespread exchange among practitioners by using a variety of collaboration technologies. Practitioners will make critical new connections through expanded online communities—an internet platform of blogs, discussion forums, wikis, and other tools—in addition to video conferencing, telephone, email, and face-to-face meetings.

A **Support Team** will assist people as they build and use the Network and form communities of practice. The Support Team will provide technical assistance and ensure that significant new learning is highlighted for the wider NPS community.

### **Launching a Pilot:**

As the Network is a new approach for the NPS, a pilot will serve as the initial phase of implementation. Lessons learned in the pilot will guide future development of the Network. The pilot will support peer-to-peer exchange focused on youth development programs. It is envisioned that the pilot will advance the design of new youth programs and create additional capacity for problem-solving for existing programs. NPS park and program staff will be invited to participate. Practitioners will be able to form affinity groups on specific topics such as mentorship, intake and career development, and cultural competency. This pilot will serve as an experiment to determine how practitioners use and benefit from the Network. In addition, we will identify what works well and what needs improvement, required capacity building and support, and needed future investments. It is anticipated that the pilot will begin in the summer 2011 (after approved online social media is available) and an update on the pilot will be provided to the NLC at their fall meeting.

## **Attachment: Project Team Members**

At the request of the NPS Director, Deputy Director Mickey Fearn led this effort and Nora Mitchell, Director of the Conservation Study Institute, served as the project coordinator. A national project team of NPS program staff, drawn from nominations from the NLC, developed the concept for the Network. The project team contributed to the development of the concept paper, identified existing examples that support and share innovation, and engaged others over the four-month project period. There was an enthusiastic response from all who were asked to serve on the concept-development project team. As a result, the team included a valuable mix of disciplines, positions and experience, representing parks, regions and the national office.

### **NLC Advisory Group**

Chris Abbett, ARD Partnerships, SER  
Sgt. Stephanie Clark, Special Events Coordinator, USPP  
Michael Creasey, Superintendent, LOWE  
Andrew Ferrell, Historian, NCPTT  
Bill Gwaltney, ARD Workforce Enhancement, IMR  
Marta Kelly, Chief of Interpretation & Education, WASO  
Sanny Lustig, Ranger Hurricane District, OLYM  
Dr. Ryan Monello, Wildlife Biologist Wildlife Health Team  
Wendy O'Sullivan, ARD Partnerships, NCR  
Bob Page, Director, OCLP  
Pedro Ramos, Superintendent, BICY  
Woody Smeck, Superintendent, SAMO currently Acting Regional Director, NCR  
Robin White, Superintendent, CHSC  
Clara Wooden, ARD Equal Employment Opportunity & Recruitment, MWR

### **Coordinating Committee**

Mickey Fearn, DD  
Delia Clark, NPS Partner

Sarah Conlon, Senior Organization Development Consultant, WASO  
Kathy Hanson, Chief, Learning & Development, WASO  
Jennifer Jewiss, NPS Partner  
Brian Joyner, Writer/Editor, detail to DD, WASO  
Dick Lazeres, Network Project Manager, WASO  
Glen Mazur, Deputy Chief Learning & Development, WASO  
Brent Mitchell, NPS Partner  
Nora Mitchell, Director, CSI  
Marcia Schramm, Human Resource Specialist, WASO  
Rebecca Stanfield McCown, Community Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator, CSI  
Sue Waldron, Director of Communications, WASO  
Julia Washburn, AD Interpretation & Education, WASO  
Linda Wright, Organization Development Consultant, WASO

### **Liaison with National Park System Advisory Board**

Loran Fraser, NPSAB  
Margaret Wheatley, NPSAB member and advisor to Project Team

**Developing a Network for Innovation and Creativity  
to Enhance NPS Learning and Effectiveness:  
A Concept Paper Requested by the National Leadership Council  
May 2011**

This concept paper, requested by the National Leadership Council, describes the goal, benefits and next steps for initiating the Network for Innovation and Creativity.

**Goal of the Network**

*“It’s not about critical mass; it’s about critical connections.” -- Meg Wheatley*

The goal of the Network is to rapidly share knowledge, new approaches, and insights from practical experience to solve mission-critical problems and advance organizational excellence. The Network will directly benefit NPS and partner practitioners in all disciplines, building an engaged 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce with the capacity and creativity to accomplish the NPS mission. By supporting peer-to-peer collaboration across the national park system, the Network augments and leverages existing organizational structures and formal communication processes. Ultimately, the Network is a tool to help the NPS remain relevant and more effectively serve the American public.

An education specialist at Homestead NM of America organized an educational technology training that drew attendees from five regions. The group recognized the value of staying in touch, so online they continue to brainstorm, troubleshoot, and share new ideas for using technology to reach the public.

**Benefits of the Network**

*To capitalize more effectively on successful innovations, a Center [now Network] for Innovation will “quickly identify instructive organizational experiences – successful and otherwise—and swiftly share lessons learned, along with demonstrably effective models of leadership, education, public engagement, and collaboration for landscape-level conservation and preservation.” -- Second Century Commission*

As the National Park Service prepares for its second century, there is a sense of urgency to learn and adapt at a pace required by a rapidly changing world. To advance national priorities – relevancy, education, stewardship, and workforce – the Network will:

- accelerate dissemination of ideas and lessons learned
- build and sustain informal networks that connect practitioners across geographically dispersed sites and programs to enhance their ability to solve problems more quickly and strategically
- leverage existing investments in program development, evaluation and learning to provide greater benefits for the system – to think and learn like a system.
- attract, welcome, and retain the next generation of leaders who learn and communicate through online communities.

## Key Components of a Network

1. **Practitioners** are the people of the NPS and their partners who use and contribute to the Network. They benefit from finding their peers and exchanging knowledge to improve their practice and their performance. They participate as individuals, in groups, and as communities of practice with colleagues who share a profession or an interest in a topic important to their work. Through their active participation the Network will grow and become increasingly useful.
2. **Communication Tools** will support rapid and widespread exchange among practitioners by using a variety of collaboration technologies. Practitioners will make critical new connections through expanded online communities—an internet platform of blogs, discussion forums, wikis, and other tools—in addition to video conferencing, telephone, email, and face-to-face meetings.
3. A **Support Team** will assist people as they build and use the Network and form communities of practice.

Experience from other organizations indicates that to fully leverage the impact of a network it needs to be supported and cultivated, especially in the early phases of development. The Support Team will provide technical assistance and ensure that significant new learning is highlighted for the wider NPS community.

A wolverine restoration group engaged conservation professionals from federal and state agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutions. This community of practice developed – and continues to refine – new methods for translocating and caring for wolverines.

## Recommended Next Steps for Moving Forward on the Network

This paper describes the substantial promise of a Network for Innovation and Creativity. As this is a new approach, we recommend a pilot be used to move forward from this concept to an initial phase of implementation. This pilot will demonstrate all three components of the Network and work with **practitioners involved with engaging youth in diverse communities**, a cross-cutting high priority area where new approaches are urgently needed. Given the number of youth engagement programs already underway, practitioners have a wealth of experience to share and have indicated that they would benefit from opportunities to learn from each other.

We envision the pilot as an online community where enhanced peer-to-peer exchange significantly advances design of new youth programs and capacity for problem-solving for existing programs. Parks, program managers, and partners will be invited to participate. Practitioners will be able to form affinity groups on specific topics such as mentorship, intake and career development, and cultural competency. This pilot will serve as a “learning lab” to determine how practitioners use and benefit from the Network. In addition, we will identify what works well and what needs improvement, required capacity building and support, and needed future investments.

## To make this pilot effort successful, NPS leadership can:

1. encourage youth program practitioners to actively participate in this pilot;
2. endorse innovation in the use of emerging technologies to facilitate collaboration; and
3. ask NPS offices and programs (including several represented on the Coordinating Committee, see attached list) to work together as a Support Team and in collaboration with Network users to implement and learn from the pilot.

# Network for Innovation and Creativity

